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opening extract from

Scratch Kitten Goes to Sea

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1.
Scratch Falls Aboard

'You're on your own,' said Maa. 'I'm off to find your Dad. He only went to fetch a fish, but he's been gone for weeks.'

Brat mewed. Drat and Flat squabbled.

Scratch watched two tomcats fighting over a smelly fish head.

Maa biffed him on the ear.
'Did you hear me, Scratch?'

Scratch dared not biff her back. So he biffed Flat instead.

'I'll be away for a while,' said Maa, 'so look out for those boots. You saw the kick that sailor gave your brother Splat.'

Scratch yawned and scratched his neck. Maa biffed him again. 'This is important!' she said. 'People will let you stick around as long as you catch mice. And a good fat mouse is a good cat's dinner. For the last time now, what are the hunting rules?'

'Watch. Listen. Wait. And *pounce*!' sang Brat, Drat and Flat.



Scratch pounced on Maa's tail. Maa biffed him.

'Stay together and behave while I'm gone. And don't go near the ships! Remember, Paa lost his leg on a ship.'

Then Maa stalked away. Brat trailed behind her, yowling. Flat scrambled after Brat.

'But Maa, what if you never come back?' Flat whined.

'What if we get booted into the sea?' yowled Brat.

Scratch padded to the edge of the wharf. 'I'm not staying here with bossy old Drat and Brat,' he thought to himself. 'I want to sail the seas like Paa did, even if he did lose his leg.'



He looked up at a blue sailing ship moored at the wharf. It was called the *Silk'n'Spice*. Sailors were tramping up and down the gangway. They were unloading boxes of china, bales of cloth and sacks of spices.

Scratch swished his tail and twitched his ears. It looked like a bright clean ship. He wondered where it had been and where it was going next. And he wondered what sort of adventures the sailors would have once it sailed. There was only one way to find out.

'I don't care what Maa says,' Scratch said. 'I'm going to sea!'

He sprang onto one of the cables that moored the ship to the pier.



Then he clawed his way along it to the side of the boat.

'You'll be in trouble, Scratch!' Drat yowled from the dock.

'I'll tell Maa!' howled Flat.

Scratch took no notice. He scrambled over the side and landed on the deck with a thump.

Then he jumped to his feet and washed his paw busily, as if falling aboard was what he had meant to do. After all, a cat must be dignified, even if his ginger fur was scruffy and his tail was a tangle.

He was so busy licking that he didn't notice the *thud-plonk-thud-plonk* sound behind him. Suddenly there was a sharp pain in his tail.

Scratch twisted around, claws at the ready, to see who had trodden on his tail. All he saw was a brown, splintery, wooden leg. Beside it was a skinny, hairy, bare-footed real leg. Towering above Scratch was a thin, stooped, gloomy sailor.

He had big sad eyes and a big red nose. The lower part of his face was covered with ginger whiskers. The top of his head was covered with matted hair that trailed down his back in a scruffy ginger pigtail.

'You great oaf!' Scratch yowled. He puffed out his fur and forced his tail into a bristling brush. Then he lashed out and scratched the splintery leg.

Scratch had the most splendid claws of his litter, but the sailor didn't even squeak. Instead he stooped down and snarled in Scratch's face. 'You foul little flea-bitten moggy,' he said. 'How did you get on board? You think you can take Fluffy's place?'

He snatched Scratch by the scruff and shook him. Then he reached over the ship's rail and dangled Scratch above the water. Scratch twisted wildly, hooked his sharp claws into the sailor's wrist and hung on tight.

The sailor howled. Scratch yowled.



Scratch twisted himself free, clambered onto the sailor's wrist, gave a leap and sailed clear over the sailor's shoulder. His paws hit the deck and he ran, scrambling for the safety of a lifeboat. Underneath the canvas cover were some coils of rope. Scratch hid amongst them.

The sailor stumped away with a toss of his plait, growling threats. Scratch stared after him until he was out of sight, then settled down for a wash to calm his hammering heart. He'd almost been thrown overboard! It was not a good start to sea life.

Maybe things would look better after a nap.

2.
Scratch Finds the Top Spot

Scratch woke up hours later with a fierce pain. He arched up, fur bushy and tail lashing. But it wasn't a sailor trying to hurt him. This time the pain came from his empty stomach.

He peered out at the sailors as they hurried about casting ropes and setting sails. The deck tilted slowly one way, then the other.